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Cochran VA Medical Center Update:

IG Investigation Needed In Wake of Revelation That VA's Investigation Is Not Independent

Carnahan Met Today With High-Ranking VA Officials To Discuss Outstanding Questions

(ST. LOUIS, MO) - Led by Congressman Russ Carnahan (MO-03), a bipartisan group of representatives sent a letter to the Inspector General of the U.S. Veterans' Affairs Department, strongly urging him to launch a formal investigation into recent patient safety lapses at the John Cochran VA Medical Center in St. Louis. The move comes in the wake of revelations at a Congressional Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing - held last week in St. Louis - that the VA has yet to assign an independent panel to look into the matter.

"We insist that your office launch a full investigation into this indefensible breach of standard operating procedures, as well as any illegal action taken against an employee who rightfully raised concerns regarding the sterilization process," wrote the representatives, including members from Missouri and Illinois, as well as the Democratic Chairman and Republican Ranking Member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee.

Earlier this month, the VA announced that it had tasked the Administrative Investigative Board (AIB) with looking into recent reports that more than 1,800 veterans from Missouri, Illinois and other states may have been exposed to blood-borne pathogens at the Cochran Medical Center. But after multiple requests for more information about who comprised the AIB, the VA revealed last week that the board was comprised of VA employees - a fact that Carnahan said called into question the Board's ability to conduct an independent and unbiased investigation.

"From the start, I have held that in order to get to the bottom of this issue, there must be a thorough, transparent and independent investigation," Carnahan said. "I was deeply disturbed to learn that the VA assigned its own employees to investigate the matter. That just doesn't make sense."

Yesterday, Carnahan expressed growing frustration with the slow pace of answers coming from the U.S. Veterans Affairs Department regarding some of the most pressing questions related to the problems with the sanitization process of dental equipment at the Cochran center. In a letter to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki, Carnahan demanded responses to several outstanding questions, including detailed information regarding the number of cases of Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV among veterans who received care at the Cochran dental clinic. Carnahan met today with VA Under Secretary Robert Petzel and Assistant Secretary Joan Evans to discuss these outstanding issues.

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